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THE **C**ITY AND THE **F**OREST BY THE **S**EA

A POEM

BY ALLISON R. LAWSHE





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A POEM

✓
By Allison R. Lawshe

With a Drawing by the Author.

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ONCE when slow the sun was sinking
Drowsy, dreamy to his rest,
Gleaming soft-eyed loving glances
From his couch in the golden west—
Gleaming farewells, good-night kisses
From his couch in the amber west,

I was standing on the lonely shore of a softly-singing sea—
Standing in rapture beside a sweet and low-voiced sea
That sang a strangely mysterious melody.

II

AND while listening to the sad-toned
Singing wavelets on that shore,
I beheld a wondrous City
Glowing golden far before—
Fabled, fair and famous City
Glowing golden on that shore.

Gazing with long looks of rapture on that City by the Sea
I the seraphim saw sailing in mad ecstasy—
Sailing singing o'er that City by the Sea.

III

NOW from out the golden distance,
O'er the voicing waters wide,
Winged a Form, a Figure toward me
That alighted at my side;
And I looked upon this Figure—

Looked and, wondering, softly sighed:
"Thou belongest to those Beings in that City fair to see—
That beauteous City— tell oh! tell me what its name may be."
Spoke the Figure: "'Tis the City by the Sea.

IV

“**T**IS the City where the beauteous
Souls, the seraphim, abide;
It is built of marble castles
Cloudward reaching, rainbow dyed,
And its happy hosts, joy-haunted,
Throng this City radiant-eyed—
Throng its streets and fill the air in which they float in ecstasy
With such wondrous music that the rebellious winds and sea,
When brewing evil, are charmed from their conspiracy.”

V

THEN I said: "O Figure fairest
 On its beauties thou dost dwell,
 And I thank thee, but, I pray thee,
 Do its name most truly tell—
 Tell the name of this fine City
 Where these happy Beings dwell."

And the Figure, while the shadows shifted o'er the darkening lea,
 Answered: "'Tis the City, beauteous City by the Sea;
 'Tis the fair, the flowered City by the Sea.

VI

“ **T**IS the City where the souls that
With unending joy are blessed
Live and work but for the Truest,
Knowing that the True is best,
Knowing that the True is wisest—
Beauty-flushed by Beauty's quest:

And these Beings once were burden-bearing humans faithfully,
Trustfully through each trial and sorrow striving true to be —
Seeking, searching for this City by the Sea.”

VII

THEN the robe of Night down falling
 Wrapped in gloom the fair display,
And the heavens, sable curtained,
 Cloaked from view each starry ray,
So that blackness, inky blackness,
 Held no trace of banished Day;
And a wild and woeful wailing floated from the summer sea—
 Wild and weird, unwelcome wailing wandered up to me
 From that dark and drear and dismal summer sea!

VIII

NOW beside the sea a Forest
Wild and wide (and known to Fame)
Lay, and from this gloom-girt Forest
Hideous, ghoulish howlings came—
Hideous, hellish, heart-stilling howlings,
Nameless here,— they have no name!
And I looked and lo! a lurid, blood-red glare glid o'er the lea,
Gleamed and glared from out this gloom-girt Forest by the Sea—
This ghastly, evil-brooding Forest by the Sea!

IX

STRAIGHT I asked the Figure by me,
Asked with faint and failing breath:

“What oh! what can mean this marvel?

What this horror — means it death?

Or (help Heaven!) means it torture—

Is this Hell?” The Figure saith:

“’Tis the drear and dreadful Forest where the ghouls in hellish glee—

Gnome and devil — nightly revel, revel frenziedly—

Revel in this reeking Forest by the Sea.”

X

SAID he further while the wailings,
Wild and weird, did rend the gloom:
“And these grinning ghouls and ghastly
In this lurid Forest-tomb,
Evil-formed by Evil seeking,
Shadowed by a woeful doom,
They, like the seraphim, once did walk (but walked ah! blindly)
In the homes and haunts of men,—blindly, blindly,—
Howling demons in this Forest by the Sea!”

XI

THEN the vision quickly vanished ;
Vanished, too, the Figure fair,
And I stood bathed in the sunlight's
Last faint ruby ruddy glare,
While there floated sweetest incense
To me o'er the twilight air—
Sweetest incense and the soft song of the silken summer sea—
Silken, sad-toned, soft-voiced sea singing rapturously
Of what strange, unknown, unknowable mystery!

XII

AND I muttered, thinking, dreaming,
Divining what no tongue can tell:

“I myself am judge and culprit;

‘I Myself am Heaven and Hell;’

Heaven is the increased nature;

The dwarfed and stunted soul is Hell.”

“Heaven is the increased nature” came a murmur up to me;

“The dwarfed and stunted soul is Hell” came an echo from the sea—
From the restless, ruby-flashing summer sea.



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